



### **Human Rights Committee**

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### **Automatic Voter Registration**

By: Human Rights Committee

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### **Position Statement:**

*The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation dealing with increasing access to voting in the State of Iowa.*

### **Position**

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation that implements automatic voter registration. The legislation would mandate that upon interaction with the Department of Motor Vehicles and social service agencies, electronic records of eligible citizens be securely sent to election officials with necessary information for registration. It would be an opt-out system where citizens would have the option to decline to register at the initial transaction with the government agency. The legislation should also take steps to ensure the security of electronic systems.

### **Status Quo**

#### **1. THE MOTOR VOTER ACT**

In 1993, Congress passed the “National Voter Registration Act,” commonly referred to as the “Motor Voter” law. This act requires state agencies to give citizens the chance to register while they are applying for or renewing other services. In these interactions, almost all of the necessary information to register to vote would already be obtained (Samples).

#### **2. ELECTRONIC REGISTRATION**

In 2006, Iowa implemented electronic voter registration. At DOT offices, citizens may register to vote by verbally answering a set of questions and writing their signatures on an electronic pad. DOT workers record their verbal answers electronically. Registration information is sent to election officials daily. This electronic system has caused processing information to be more effective, easier, and more timely. Rates of registration at DOT offices significantly grew following the 2006 law (Brennan).

### **Rationale**

#### **1. EASE OF ACCESS**

The registration process can be a hurdle that some potential voters don’t want to jump over. Citizens are deterred by the cumbersome process required to register. Automatic voter registration would ease that burden. This measure would be an important first step to spur voter mobilization. It puts one hindrance to voting behind the citizen, setting the stage for increased participation in the future (McGhee and Romero).

An opt-out system would change the default status of a citizen from unregistered to registered. Behavioral science indicates this would result in more registered voters because people more often choose the default option over alternatives (Wang). Do not mistake this policy as causing a net-increase in work that must be done by the government. It actually reduces the total burden on election officials because of benefits in processing which I will discuss below.

## 2. ACCURACY OF VOTER ROLES

Automatic voter registration would make the database of registered voters more accurate. Illegible handwriting often causes the transmission of inaccurate information. By moving to a completely electronic system, the policy would cut down on errors that may occur because of paper processing. A very common problem that it would resolve is that residents who move often forget to re-register to vote. This may result in them not voting in an election at all. It also makes it difficult for election officials to maintain and update rolls. It causes confusion as to which records are permanently inactive versus which just need to be updated. Automatic registration would make sure voter rolls are up-to-date by dealing with the re-registration process during other interactions between that citizen and government agencies (McGhee and Romero).

## 3. SAVES MONEY

Automatic voter registration would be an electronic data based approach. Agency databases would contain all of the information needed for registration which would reduce the use of paper forms. Processing paper forms gets expensive as it requires “printing, collecting, completing, mailing, and manual data-entry” (Brennan).

## 4. SECURITY IN VOTER REGISTRATION

Automatic voter registration can be structured to ensure the minimization of security threats. The increased accuracy in the process would be a barrier to the manipulation of data and fraud. Cybersecurity measures can effectively defend electronic systems from attacks. Requiring authorization to access the database will prevent breaches from occurring. Monitoring for anomalies in the system would be a proactive approach to counter any potential hackers. Finally, creating a paper backup after the electronic data has been processed would minimize the harm a cyberattack would be able to do (Brennan).

### **Recommended Action**

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council advocates that legislation be passed that implements an electronic, automatic voter registration system. The legislation should require government agencies to send registration information to election officials unless the citizen opts-out. The legislation should also take measures to enhance the security of the electronic system. These should include increased monitoring, limitations on who can access the system, steps to prevent security breaches, and the creation of paper copies of registration information.

Regards,  
Human Rights Committee  
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council

## **Sources**

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